

Macedonia towards the EU: Whether and How Much Prevention Matters

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Since its formal independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1991, the Republic of Macedonia was a subject of different conflict prevention strategies utilized by numerous international institutions or particular western democracies. Trapped in the constant balancing between regional and internal challenges for peace and stability and periodically supported in its avoidance of violent scenarios, Macedonia was labelled the most successful case of conflict prevention or as a successful case of crisis prevention, later (since 2001), by the numerous international representatives. Different arguments were used in order to support such assessments. The main argument is that the violence that was experienced in other ex-Yugoslav conflicts did not emerge. Such an argument could be accepted as the essential only if the main objective of specific international institutions preventive strategies were defined as violence avoidance or management thereby supporting only restrictive preventive approach. However, to keep the country on the razor's edge while balancing the stability by means of the instruments for operational conflict prevention could be hazardous approach. Instead, long-term strategy for structural prevention towards the region in general and towards the Republic of Macedonia in particular is required.

Key words: Macedonia, accession to the EU, conflict prevention

1. Introduction

The processes of accession and integration of the region and the Republic of Macedonia into the European Union have been seen as a core stabilizing and comprehensive preventive approach. This is not because some believe that integration is magic solution for complex regional and internal challenges, but because of publicly shared confidence that mainstreaming of democratic norms and standards, respect for the rule of law, strengthening of democratic institutions through this process, will bring peace, stability and development. Although the willingness to integrate the country into the EU had been

demonstrated earlier (Macedonia with aide-memoire in 1992 asked for European Agreement), Macedonia became PHARE partner-country as late as 1996. Macedonia became full participant in the Stabilization and Association Process, and the 2000 PHARE National Programme and the CARDS programme for 2001 were moulded around the priorities identified by Stabilization and Association Agreement.¹ According to the SAA co-operation with the EU will be developed over the transitional period of ten years following its entry into force. Macedonian Government has developed a National Action Plan and set up the strategic priorities guiding medium to long-term actions. The Republic of Macedonia applied for membership of the EU on 22 March 2004. On May 2004, the Council of Minis-

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ters requested the European Commission to prepare an opinion on the application. Therefore the process, which could lead the Republic of Macedonia to joining EU, was opened.

We are arguing here that developing a more targeted and comprehensive regional conflict prevention policy (SAP) of the EU (not excluding other regional and international institutions) as well as developing local ownership and responsibility for the process are preconditions for stability, security and development. Given the fact that the process of democratic transition is not straightforward this article will open the specifics of the post conflict security challenges in Macedonia and the preventive approach of the EU in overcoming post-conflict peacebuilding challenges.

2. The challenges for peacebuilding and conflict prevention

Very often it happens that the key figures of the academic and policy making communities in Macedonia disagree on the issues of public concern. Consequently it appears that the task of following the origin of the problem in question and connecting different conceptions is more easily said than done. The confusion surrounding the utilization of this endeavour appears not only because of contesting theoretical and policy paradigms but also because of at least two of more accompanying factors: one of them, the predominantly ethnically motivated individual or community perceptions on the problem and the second, the position of the international actors that also claims for "ownership" over the issue.

The 2001 crisis in the Republic of Macedonia also becomes a subject of such endeavours. Therefore at least three 'ownership' attempts appeared as a consequence of various explanations and justifications of the reasons for the conflict and the use of violence by different actors. But the explanation (predominantly ethnic Macedonian) that criminal and ethnic political agendas have found common ground differs from the explanation (predominantly ethnic Albanian) that poor respect for human rights and minority status thereof has been the primary sources of the conflict. Judging by the position taken by the international community *vis-à-vis* the Macedonian conflict, it seemed that this conflict was similar if not identical to the other Yugoslav conflicts. Whether or not that was truly the case was irrelevant, since the already 'tested medicines,' (from the other Yu-

goslav conflicts) offered acceptable if not desirable remedy. The ethnic radicalism and nationalism, human rights violation and weak state institutions have created the international actor's explanatory agenda.

The confronting internal and external discourse over the root causes of the conflict or about immediate causes of the crisis have reduced the ground for reaching commonly acceptable explanation, commonly supported solution or agenda, for that matter, of a post-conflict priorities. Therefore it is not incorrect to observe that on the Macedonian post-conflict peace building agenda there are as many issues and priorities as different "interveners" and stakeholders.

However, the quest for security within and around the Macedonian state and society was neither closed nor irrelevant issue for the entire period of its independence. But paradoxically enough up to the crisis and the armed conflict in 2001 the external security concerns dominated the domestic ones. Even when the challenge to enhance internal security and stability was perceived as one of a higher priority (as it was before and during the Kosovo crisis), or as the challenge reached a critical level (as it was during the period of the armed conflict) the problem remained silent (at least on political and structural level).

The situation remained contradictory: Although the officials warnings about increase in illegal arms transfer and firearm related criminal activities became more serious if not alarming and the need for improving public security became more obvious the attention and the support of local and international actors over this issue remained low. What additionally gave the bitter taste to the overall problem was the predominantly ethnic perspective on almost any specific case or/and action performed by the institutions responsible for the maintenance of the public security. Accordingly, the post-conflict public security management has remained trapped in the contradiction that more efficient public security management will disrupt or even endanger interethnic relations.

3. Macedonia had to handle transitional challenges

The fact that Macedonia was born almost "painlessly" (without any armed violence) from the former Yugoslav federation could not have been used long as a key and the only investment into the proc-

ess of transition and democracy building. This was not possible not only because Macedonia had to handle huge amount of transitional challenges but because at the same time it had to refrain itself from the influences of the regional spirals of violence. However, the efforts of the international and local actors in providing military security proved to be an insufficient tool for removing the various forms of direct violence, deterring its contagious effects and sustaining the overall feeling of security (especially in endorsing various aspects of public security).² Weak state institutions, limited economic potentials, political parties of ethnic origin, multi-ethnicity in search of balance of ethnic power, inefficient and politicized governance that have characterized protracted transitional period prevented the citizens from possible access to democratic institutions and rule of law. The internal security actors, unintentionally or not, have supported the situation of protracted democratic transition and hibernation within the Macedonian society. They did it simply by sharing its traditional security function with, and more or less relying on, the presence of international actors as a security guarantees. Instead of providing security while supporting and simultaneously becoming a part of the processes of democratization they have also suffered transitional weaknesses.

The gloomy internal political and security situation in touch with the contiguous effects of the Kosovo crisis in 2001 was easily triggered and turned into serious political and military crisis. After six months of uncertainty and armed conflict between the Macedonian security forces and the National Liberation Army (NLA), the Framework Agreement (FA) was signed in August 2001. It put an end to the armed confrontations and provided a ground for constitutional and political reforms that were considered significant part of the political process of peacebuilding as well as for addressing the issue of police reforms as a part of the process of introducing democratic policing.³

However, after the signing of the FA the list of pre-conflict open dilemmas did not become shorter nor the security situation eased. But if the attention is on the internal security and the risks for the human and public security then the central themes are: increased criminal activities with ethnic and trans-border dimensions; illegal arms transfer, smuggling and stocking of light weapons; illegal human trafficking and criminalization of human trafficking; organized crime and corruption; recruitment and mobilization of irregular groups; criminal attacks on members of the Police Forces.⁴

The Framework Agreement and the Stabilization and Association Agreement with EU (SAA) are the two strategic documents that are to channel the conflict prevention strategy and operational and long-term goals of security sector reforms (SSR). The SAA in the part of the Justice and Home Affairs and the CARDS Program set up a ground for more sustainable and comprehensive process of reforms concerning public security management. This program could become a turning point in establishing local ownership in the process of reforms and capacity development in the public security sector. Consequently, more organized approach toward the Police reforms commenced in March 2002. A combined team of international and local experts prepared complex strategic documents that were adopted consequently: Strategy for Police Reform (August 2003), National Action Plan for Police Reform (January 2004), Strategy for Integrated Border Management (January 2004), National Action Plan for Migration and Asylum (December 2002), National Action Plan for Fight against the Organized Crime. The Strategy for Police Reform refers to the process of reform as to a comprehensive and complex process of building the Police architecture suitable for a democratic society based on the principles of the rule of law and respect and protection of the basic human rights. Decentralization of the Police organization and transfer of the function to their local units is one of the key principles that should contribute and rebuild the trust and efficiency of the Police. This process, according to some suggestions, should be parallel with the process of accession of Macedonia into EU.

4. Local or international ownership over the post-conflict peacebuilding

The presence and the mandate of different international actors significantly influenced the peacebuilding process in Macedonia. Beside different theoretical interpretations of peacebuilding as a post-conflict technique aimed at rebuilding social infrastructure and creating basic conditions for security this concept in Macedonia (at least from the perspective of academic community) has been viewed as a pre-conflict as well. The early role of the OSCE monitoring mission and the High Commissioner on National Minorities in confidence building process in Macedonia, and later the presence of the UN mission (UNPREDEP) and its positive contribution to state stability largely have developed positive public perceptions and attitudes towards the

contribution of the mission. In contrast, the presence of NATO extraction mission before the Kosovo intervention has raised public suspicions that peace and stability in the country could be easily endangered. The mildewing of the forces up to four times size of the Macedonian Army has additionally complicated the perceptions of the security in the country while the meaning of the security reached controversial dimensions: who is actually responsible for the security of the state and its citizens, and from what kind of threats?

In sum the general observations about the role played by the international community in Macedonia before, during and after the crisis in 2001 is that it is both ambitious and ambiguous. That is to say, on the one hand the engagement of the international community in resolving the crisis in 2001 deserves appreciation on the other hand the oversight of the local realities for different reasons continues.

After the FA has been signed the country entered a fragile post conflict situation. In order to bolster the turning point towards peacebuilding NATO agreed to ease the process of voluntary collection of weapons handed over by the NLA. The expectations of NATO officials and the Macedonian citizens were different. While the citizens expected disarmament of former combatants as precondition and a sign of commitment to the peace process the main expectation and contribution of the mission from the perspective of NATO officials was "only" to express its support to the Ohrid Agreement rather than complete disarmament. The Essential Harvest was proclaimed successful after collecting of 3,000 pieces of weapons. This was unacceptably low number for most of the internal peacebuilding actors and the broader public. In their opinion disarmament was an unfinished job.⁵ As mentioned earlier in this article the problem of illegal weapons is one of the core problems in removing the sources of violence from the Macedonian society and the broader region.

NATO issued the second mission (TFF) immediately after the termination of the Essential Harvest with official mandate to protect international monitors. The operation Allied Harmony followed and lasted until March 2003. The mandate of the mission was to protect the OSCE and EU monitors and to advise the Government in the process of taking security control over the country. Considering that the total duration of these missions was approximately eight months they can be easily described as a quick fix missions. In local experts opinion the unfinished process of disarmament and collection of

illegal weapons has generated the challenges both for the international monitors and the citizens.

The EU led missions Concordia and Proxima followed the NATO missions. The first one had more characteristics of a monitoring than of a peacekeeping mission but the second one is a new type of police mission. EUPOL Proxima is a part of the wider EU strategy of promotion of reforms and contribution to the stability and the rule of law in the region within the objectives of the Stabilization and Association process. The purpose of the mission is to assist the local authorities in Macedonia which identify the organized crime as the main challenge for the public security in the country. Assistance is to be provided in the process of development of police forces according to the international and European standards. Under the EU-CARDS program the reforms in Macedonia are supported in the following areas: Administration of justice (supporting justice and prosecution reforms); Police reform (supporting strategy for Police reform and training); Integrated Border Management (strengthening the border control and creating the Border Police Service); Customs (assistance in administrative capacity building to help the fight against fraud, corruption and organized crime); Asylum and Migration (development of National Action Plan for Migration and Asylum and the Law on the Movement and Residence of Foreigners); Fight against crime (strengthening strategies and developing capacity to fight against money laundering and drug related crimes).⁶ According to some police officials the program is comprehensive and ambitious but immediate improvements or results are less likely to happen in the short terms. The approach should rather be viewed as a long-term process of progressive implementation of tools that will be recognized as appropriate for the local context.

5. Conclusion

The peacebuilding process in Macedonia can be marked as a challenging and a long-lasting process that started after the peaceful dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. The fact that serious violence and internal crisis have appeared only in 2001 and that the international community have directly introduced the post-conflict peacebuilding strategy (i.e. Framework Agreement) must not be misused. By taking the position that the peacebuilding followed the intervention, the process could be easily /formally but not substantially divided, because this process has the characteristics and downsides immanent for de-

mocracy in transition but also for a post-conflict society. Therefore the fact that armed violence in Macedonia took place in 2001 should not be misused for the creation of unnatural or mechanical divisions of this process. The armed violence is not the only form of violence that threatens the peace and the public security. The untraditional threats for the security in Macedonia have derived from the regional complexity as well as from within the country. The problem of the public security has not received adequate attention until the 2001 crisis. Special attention was to be paid to the dramatic increase of the criminal activities, corruption, and armed related crimes, such as illegal weapon trafficking. Another characteristic

is that the perceptions of the public security threats vary according to ethnicity and according to the fact that the citizens are more sensitive to specific non-traditional threats (corruption and organized crime) than the Government considers its priority. The FA introduced by the international community has initiated the process of the reforms in the public security area. The EU CARDS program extends and enhances the process. The complete implementation of the anticipated programs that refer to various areas of the public security and the professional and efficient functioning of the public security institutions will enhance the 'local ownership' over the public security management.

NOTES

1 Macedonia signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU and its member states in 2001.

2 Macedonia was granted gratis period while the UN preventive peacekeeping mission was keeping a bird eye on the military and political developments around and within the country in order to prevent spillover of conflicts and to upgrade the broader international peacemaking process in the Former Yugoslavia. The public opinion has positively estimated the contribution of the UNPREDEP for the stability of the country. More detailed explanation of the public opinion attitudes towards the mission has been presented in Georgieva L.: "Preventive Deployment: Missing Link Between Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding", paper presented at 40th Annual ISA Conference, Washington D.C., USA, 16-20 February, 1999

3 Key aspects of the FA related to the police were directed to address better representation of the ethnic communities (mostly Albanian) in the police, redeployment of ethnically mixed police patrols to the crisis areas, retraining of the police and introduction of community policing and restructuring of the police.

4 The Mol statistics for the period 1991-2001 on firearm - related criminal offences and the number of offenders confirms

the direct relation between SALW supply and the crime rate. According to the Safeworld report violent crime has risen significantly since the elections in 2002 - 32 murders have been registered within one-year period, mainly in the Tetovo area. www.safeworld.co.uk

The recent official report issued by the Ministry of Interior confirmed the rise of the indicators of crime (in numbers and percentage for the nine months of 2004 compared with the same period last year). Illegal firearms trafficking increased during the period 1998-2003 and resulted in 883 criminal charges against 1228 offenders. www.moi.gov.mk

5 <http://disarmament.un.org/cab/docs/nationalreports/2002/macedonia.pdf>

6 EUPOL Proxima is comprised of 200 police and civilian legal experts. It operates at central Mol, regional and local level. Approximately 150 international police officers are divided between the crises areas of Kumanovo, Tetovo, and Gostivar. The armed component of the mission is composed of French Gendarmerie. Duration of the mission has been prolonged since December 2005.

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